

Chag Samai'ach. Today is the first day of Pesach, 15 Nissan 5786, corresponding to April 2, 2026. This Torah Dialogue is for the first three days of Pesach and features the commentary of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, my Rebbe, whose Yahrzeit is this week.

## The Haggadah

1. The Seder Plate should have two cooked items on the Plate, representing the Pesach sacrifice and the Chagigah offering. Rav Huna stated that this requirement may be fulfilled by using beets and rice. Rav Yosef disagreed and insisted that we use two types of meat. The Rambam agreed with Rav Yosef, but the general accepted custom is to use one item of meat and a roasted egg for the Chagigah. The egg symbolizes joy and mourning because the first night of Pesach always occurs on the same day of the week as Tisha B'Av. The Beit HaLevi, the Rav's great-grandfather, explained that the slavery in Egypt was supposed to be 400 years. It was shortened to 210 years because the Jewish people were quickly assimilating into the Egyptian society. So, although Pesach is a holiday of joy, it also tells us that there were years of Exile in our future. And we do eat a hardboiled egg prior to Tisha B'Av.

2. There is also a relationship between the Seder and Yom Kippur. The Rambam states that at both times there is a requirement to have a service that has a specific Seder, a prescribed order for the service. By following a particular order indicates that there is a connection between the different parts of the service. At the Seder we even recite the prescribed order with the Kaddeish, Urchatz... The order is required. For example, the Karpas occurs early on in the evening because it is used to arouse the curiosity of the children. That must come before we begin the Maggid, the telling of the story of the Exodus. We need to relate to all members of the family before we get to the serious parts of the Haggadah.

3. TIME. The realization of what time is a real phenomenon in Judaism. In the Torah, we see that the first Mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a nation is Rosh Chodesh. This Mitzvah is given just prior to the Exodus. This is because when a person is a slave, he has no awareness or control of time. He is totally under the supervision of his master. When the Jews became free, they are now in possession of the awareness of time in their lives. When we recall the events of our past, we re-live them. We re-experience the slavery and then becoming free. We acquire the sense of time in our lives. Past events that are not re-experienced are not only historical, but belong to the

world of archaeology. Past events that have totally disappeared from our existence. We can remember them, but they exist only in our memory. The Exodus is being re-experienced tonight in our lives each year.

4. MEZIGAH. In the Haggadah, we are instructed to do MEZIGAH, which is more than just pouring the cup of wine. It is the diluting of the wine to each person's preferred strength and taste. It would seem that the MEZIGAH is required to be done at night for the Seder. The Rav stated that it transforms the cup of wine into a Kos shel Berachah, a cup of blessing. The fact that the preparation of the cup of wine must be done at the Seder means that we need to sanctify the wine before drinking it. We see in the Mishnah (Pesachim 116a) that we are required to prepare the second cup before we tell the story of the Exodus, a great deal earlier than drinking the second cup. The diluting of the wine could have been done well before the Seder. The fact that it is done at the Seder shows that it is a necessary part of the Seder. It is an act that a free man does, not a slave.

5. There was a disagreement between Rav Soloveitchik and his cousin, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, regarding the use of grape juice for the Four Cups of Wine at the Seder. The Rav felt that any drink upon which you say the blessing Borei Pri HaGafen is acceptable for this Mitzvah. Rav Moshe Feinstein felt that there is another component for this Mitzvah. This drink must be a Borei Ori HaGafen, plus it must be a drink that you use to make a toast at the meal. And no one uses grape juice to make a toast. I like this added idea of making a toast, to raise our cups in honor of Hashem in celebration of our becoming free. Maybe when great producers introduced Sparkling Grape Juice, this was to elevate the importance of grape juice into a cup that we would raise as a toast. What Reb Moshe introduced to the discussion was an additional concept to the whole Halachah of the Four Cups.

6. HASAVAH. We are required to recline during different parts of the Seder, indicating a feeling of freedom, relaxing. A slave doesn't get to appear relaxed. He is always poised, literally at attention, ready to obey his master's commands. He is fearful of appearing independent in the presence of his master. His fear is justified in his current situation. The Hasavah, is his new condition, being able to throw away his fear and his poised position of obedience. We are now free and independent, no longer required to obey anybody. We are courageous in our rejection of anybody giving us orders. We now defy any authority. Yet we still submit to Hashem's authority over us.

Similarly, if we are at a Seder with our Rebbe, we cannot embrace Hasavah. We are bound to respect and submit to Hashem's authority and to our Rebbe.

7. KARPAS. We tell the story of the Exodus, while all the time trying to arouse the children to be interested, and to ask once they see something that is a departure from the norm. The idea is to blend the story with words, songs, and doing different actions that would engage the children. We treat all the children as if they were the child who does not know what to ask. Our Karpas is to dip a vegetable (parsley, celery, potato, or radish) into salt water (or, as many Sephardim do, vinegar) in a combination of a symbol of freedom into a symbol of slavery, hoping to arouse the curiosity of all at the table. The second time we dip is the Marror into Charoset. All this is to provoke the interest of all in attendance. Telling the story with words isn't enough. Children do not listen if they are not interested.

8. MAH NISHTANNAH. The Rav remembered how his grandfather, the Brisker Rav, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, ran his Seder. He, the grandfather, said the Mah NISHTANNAH, not the children. He felt, as did the Rav, that the child should ask spontaneously and not be coached in advance a scripted text of questions. According to the Rambam (Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 8:2), the four questions of Mah Nishtannah were not designed for the child. They are much too difficult a text. Rather, the leader of the Seder should say these questions. According to the Rav, the proper way to recite these questions were for everyone at the table, young and older, should say these questions. These questions boil down to one statement: How different is this night from all other nights.

#### TEN QUESTIONS FOR YOUR SEDER TABLE. 5786

1. The Haggadah has symbols representing Freedom and Slavery. Why both? We are celebrating our Freedom, not our Slavery. (Me'Am Lo'Ez)
2. What two Jewish holidays are centered in the Home, and not in the Synagogue? And why?
3. Baruch HaMakom...Why is Hashem referred to as HaMakom, the Place?
4. When do we refer to Hashem as HaMakom in our daily lives?
5. Nine of the Plagues occurred during the daytime. Which Plague occurred at night and Why? (Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai)
6. Which song in the Haggadah praises Hashem for giving us more than the basics of life? He gave us many luxuries!

7. I understand Horseradish as the Marror. It certainly is bitter. Why is lettuce considered a kosher accepted vegetable for Marror?

8. Why are only the first two paragraphs of Hallel said as part of the Maggid section of the Seder? Telling the story of the Exodus.

9. Why is it a custom to start the meal with a hard boiled egg?

10. What is the last line added to the Haggadah? It is the only line from the "modern" period of Jewish history (post 15th century).

#### ANSWERS FOR THE SEDER TABLE 5786

1. The answer I prefer is historical. The first Seder was the night before our Freedom. When we began the Seder we were slaves. When we finished our Seder after midnight, we were Free.,so it made sense.

2. Pesach and Chanukah. I liked an answer that was given to me decades ago by a Lutheran minister. He said: In Christianity, we preach and teach that God is in the Church. In Judaism, you make sure to teach that Hashem is also in the home!

3. The Midrash states that Hashem is the "place in the universe." Hashem encompasses the universe. All existence is filled with His glory.

4. When we wish someone comfort for a loss of a relative. And when we wish someone a Refuah Sheleimah.

5. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said that the Killing of the Firstborn was the only Plague delivered at nighttime because everyone was home. No one was in the fields or out at work.

6. Dayeinu.

7. Our slavery began as sweetness. We came to Egypt as aristocracy. Treated as royalty, being the viceroy's family. We ended up as slaves. Bite into lettuce, we initially taste the sweetness, which becomes tasteless and somewhat bitter.

8. B'tzeit Yisrael MiMitzrayim is when we left Egypt and fits well in the narrative.

9. It is a reminder of the Holy Temple. The night of the first Seder is the same night of the week which marks Tisha B'Av this coming summer.

10. L'Shannah HaBa'ah Birushalayim.