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Passover in Interfaith Families

Three Essays from InterfaithFamily.com, with Discussion Guide, Tips, Recommended Resources and Activities for Children

By InterfaithFamily.com

Five Interfaith Passover Readings You Can Add to Your Hagaddah

By Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael

Here are five readings that interfaith families may want to include in their Passover seder.

Karpas Kavannah

Karpas (parsley that is dipped in salt water during the seder) kavannah (spiritual focus)--time for spring awakening, new directions--renewal and bursting forth of new ideas.

We take this time to honor others who travel with us from other faiths and cultural traditions. We acknowledge the fact that they bring a new perspective to our lives and a legacy of their own that enriches ours. We are grateful for the growth that we have experienced because they are in our lives.

As a plant bursts forth with new energy to bloom, so too we recognize that at this time of Jewish history we are blossoming in different ways. As the garden needs tending, so, too, do our relationships with spouses, in-laws and families of other traditions. Weeding out all that is not necessary and loving, we make room for fresh insight and respect. Welcome those who sit around this table for the first time or the twentieth, bringing new understanding to our discussion.

Maror/Charoset

Maror (bitter herbs, such as horseradish)--the symbol of bitterness and slavery of the Israelites in Egypt. Today, in a Jewish community that is free, this bitterness takes on another layer of meaning. We acknowledge that there are many among us who are embittered by their feelings of resentment, discomfort, and fear. We know that there is just cause for some of these feelings of fear, for Jews were "other" for so many centuries and mistreated just because they were different.

This laden history has often contributed to some of our families' inability to accept the idea of intermarriage. We acknowledge that Jewish people have struggled and been enslaved in the past and we stretch to transform this defeated posture.

We also know that sometimes our own enslavement or emotional bondage prevents us from being open to hearing each other in our marriage. Loyalties to families of origin need to be honored, unless they prevent us from creating true intimacy. Bitter places are stuck places, and we commit ourselves tonight to moving beyond our own positions to find new points of intersection and connection.

Tonight we dip our bitterness in the sweetness of charoset. Charoset, the sweet mixture of fruits and nuts, symbolizes the mortar of the bricks of the Israelites. It is also the mortar of commitment and interdependence that enabled the Jewish community to survive through those centuries of oppression. It is the building blocks of hope and tradition, which are sweet. We take our maror of fear, and by dipping it into the sweetness we create a new model that honors the fear and suffering yet holds out hope for the future.

By blending our maror and charoset, we acknowledge the blending of faiths and traditions that sit around this table here tonight. We know it is not always sweet and it is not always bitter,

but that life is a mixture of both. Just as our taste buds are designed for sweet, salty, sour and bitter, so we taste the range of textures of our relationships. By our dipping tonight we bring together the bitter and the sweet for something new to emerge.

The Artichoke on the Seder Plate

The seder plate holds the main symbols of a traditional Passover seder-- the shank bone, egg, karpas, charoset, and maror. The Kabbalists of the Middle Ages added hazeret, another kind of bitter lettuce. And in recent years feminists have added an orange on the seder plate to symbolize women's leadership roles and full empowerment in Jewish life.

The artichoke however is a new development. What is an artichoke? Surely a work of God's imagination! Many petals, with thistle and a heart. To me this has come to represent the Jewish people.

We are first of all, very diverse in our petals. We call people Jews who are everything from very traditional Orthodox Hassidim, to very liberal secular. We are Reform, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, traditional, Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Renewal, and, of course, post-denominational. We are social justice activists and soldiers; we are Israelis and Jews of the Diaspora. We are young, old, single, married. Many are vegetarian, while others swear by Hebrew National. Our skin can be white as Scandinavian, dark black as Ethiopian, and we now welcome many Chinese and Latin American adoptees. Lately we add another category, that of interfaith.

Like the artichoke, which has thistles protecting its heart, the Jewish people have been thorny about this question of interfaith marriage. Let this artichoke on the seder plate tonight stand for the wisdom of God's creation in making the Jewish people a population able to absorb many elements and cultures throughout the centuries--yet still remain Jewish. Let the thistles protecting our hearts soften so that we may notice the petals around us.

Ten Plagues of Being Intermarried

1. Not comfortable with Hebrew.
2. Can't stomach the idea of gefilte fish.
3. Songs are unfamiliar.
4. Being dragged into a war in a faraway land.
5. People assuming I'm Jewish when I'm not.
6. Not being recognized as a full citizen.
7. My in-laws' (original) discomfort.
8. Losing my family traditions/identity.
9. Children have different set of beliefs (maybe even body parts) than I do.
10. Not feeling welcomed by the community.

Sh'foch Ha Matcha

At this point in the seder, traditional Jews would open the door and shout angry words at their enemies, those who had persecuted them and had accused the Jewish community of a blood libel--of making matzah with the blood of Christian children. Opening the door at this juncture gave the Jewish family the excuse to open the door to show that there was nothing sinister happening at the seder.

Tonight we are beyond this, for we sit together, Jew and extended family. We sit around one table with an open door, and an outstretched hand. We welcome those who journey from other faiths to sit in peace and acceptance.

Tonight, we take all the pain from our journey--all the pain that women, men, children, Jew, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and all humanity have endured throughout the ages--and bring it into a healing circle of love and forgiveness. With forgiveness for what is past, we move forward in the spirit and energy of creating positive change in our future. Let us acknowledge our grief, mourn for what has been, release the past, and move powerfully forward from a place of love for our families, our communities, our planet, and all humanity. Tonight we pour our blessings into the world.



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From Easter Eggs to Afikomen, Hunting for a Deeper Meaning

By Brianne Kruger Nadeau

I have two distinct childhood memories associated with spring. One is of my older cousin hiding the afikomen, the dessert matzah, on top of the floor lamp that was too high up for us kids to see. He got in big trouble for tormenting the children, and we got the afikomen. The second was the time my younger sister ate a hole through the sugar diorama egg with the Easter scene depicted inside. My parents, who masked their laughter with a stern reprimand, believed her tummy ache was punishment enough for her deeds. These days I don't hunt for Easter eggs, but I do boil a lot of them in preparation for Passover. Every once in a while I'm tempted to color them, just for kicks.

The early Passover memory referenced above was from a time when my grandparents' generation was still hosting a Passover seder, the traditional Passover meal, each year out east. It is a memory I cherish as I continue to build my own Passover traditions in adulthood. As my parents' generation grew up and each child in it intermarried, the family seder became a thing of the past. My parents moved to the midwest and started their own family traditions, blending their Jewish and Catholic backgrounds.

Growing up we looked forward to Easter. Although we never went to church, it was fun to celebrate the non-religious aspects of the holiday. When we were younger we did Easter egg hunts at home, and later it became our tradition to spend the time we had off from school down in Florida with our family friends. The night before Easter we would gather in the kitchen of our condo and dye the dozens of eggs our mothers had boiled all day while we were playing at the pool. The older children would carefully dip only parts of the eggs in each color, creating interesting patterns and designs. The younger children would dip the entire egg in color after color, typically ending up with a brownish hue that was indicative of their less strategic egg-coloring techniques. The real fun came the next day when we would wake up to find the Easter Bunny had found us in Florida and left baskets for each of us filled with chocolates and toys, as well as a trail of eggs hidden around the room. I'll never forget the moment I realized the Easter Bunny, Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy were not real--when I discovered the K-mart sticker on my Easter basket. During these years we occasionally participated in seders with our Hebrew school. These were never really the highlight of this season, however. Easter was just much more fun for us.

It was the intent of my parents to raise us Jewish--with a few extra traditions. It is not strange for a child first moving away from home to begin to create her own traditions and discard a few of the childhood ones, and that's exactly what I did in college. I had always had a thirst to further my Jewish education and to strengthen my connections to my faith. I found a community to support that journey and jumped right in. I did my best to avoid leavening during Passover, taught my roommates how to prepare the traditional Passover matzah brei, and when I joined my family on their Florida trip, my mother would help me prepare matzah lasagna and other Passover treats.

It was not hard for me to leave Easter behind, because for us it was never more than a fun tradition. Passover, however, has become something at the heart of my Jewish identity. Redemption from

slavery, justice, education, leadership, and community are all themes expressed through the seder and these were themes and values that resonated in my own life. Though I had not realized these were Jewish values while I was growing up, they were always dear to me.

A few years ago I was spending Passover in California because I had decided to meet my family in their latest vacation spot. On the way down I visited my old college roommate, who at the time lived in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps house in Oakland. That night was the first night of Passover and I asked if her roommates might like me to lead a seder so they could see what it was like. They were moved by the themes of the traditional meal. We talked about freedom, redemption, justice--all values they as Catholics strived towards. It became clear to me then why the seder continues to be a ritual we can share with those of other faiths.

These days I anticipate with pleasure a traditional seder with the cousins that live nearby and with friends in town. They are all part of my new tradition. And although it is a bit arduous, I almost look forward to the spring cleaning that is meant to rid my home of leavening in preparation for Passover. It is a way of marking time, taking stock and making room for the things I cherish.

In the future I envision a time when I'll have my own family and I'll invite my parents and sisters to my home for a traditional seder. In a way, we'll have come full circle. Perhaps one of my sisters will even hide the afikomen above the reach of my children. You never know.



Brianne Kruger Nadeau is the assistant director for Student Leadership Development at Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life in Washington, D.C., and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in public policy at American University. She is Jewishly involved as a youth advisor at B'nai Israel Congregation in Rockville, Maryland, and as Community Relations Chair at her own synagogue, D.C. Minyan. She is politically involved with the Women's Information Network and the D.C. Anti-Street Harassment Squad.

A Kiwi on the Seder Plate

By Jim Keen

In the early 1980s, gays and feminists initiated a new custom of placing an orange on the seder plate. The idea was that this dinner service celebrating the Jews' exodus out of Egypt, and Judaism itself, should include all Jews--even those who had been marginalized within the Jewish community. There is as much room for them in Judaism as there is for an orange on a seder plate--which traditionally holds symbols of the Passover story such as bitter herbs, a shank bone, and an egg. The orange that many Jewish families now include on the plate is a symbol of how times have changed.

As a perhaps even greater sign of how things have changed, last year I ran our family's seder (the traditional course of events, or service, surrounding the Passover meal). What's the big deal? It's traditional for the father of a Jewish family to lead the service. The problem is, I'm not Jewish.

For the last fifteen years, our family has traveled to Boston to be with my in-laws for Passover. Last year, however, circumstances changed our plans, and my in-laws flew to Michigan. My wife Bonnie, our two daughters and I had the first in-our-house seder ever. We were sad that we had to miss being with Bonnie's aunt, uncle, and cousins. Yet, at the same time, it was exciting to make our home kosher and prepare the meal. We bought boxes of matzah (traditional unleavened flat bread); we made charoset (an apple-cinnamon-walnut-wine dish representative of the mortar the ancient Hebrew slaves made); we cut up chunks of horseradish (symbolic of the bitterness of slavery); and we got rid of any non-kosher, leavened, food in the cupboards. This was a house ready for Passover.

While we were making preparations and deciding who was to pick up our friend Esther, the subject of who would lead the dinner arose. I naturally assumed that Bonnie would. She is the Jewish head of our house. If she wanted to defer to her dad, then that was okay, too. When the two of them suggested that I lead the seder, my jaw dropped and nearly fell into a bowl of salt water. It was a scary thought to me. What if I messed up? What if I sang "Had Gadya" to the tune of "Dayenu"? What if I didn't do it right and Moses couldn't part the Red Sea this time? "Isn't there someone a little more qualified?" I asked.

"Jim, how many of these seders have you participated in?" Bonnie replied rhetorically. "We've been together for eighteen years--and there are two seders every Passover."

She was right. I knew this holiday backwards and forwards. The more I thought about it, leading the service was an honor and a big step for me in helping to raise our Jewish daughters. I could imagine no better way to help them understand that, even though I am Protestant, I can take a major role in teaching them about their holiday.

So I picked up Esther and brought her back to our home. Soon it was time for dinner, and we began our seder. I recited the blessings in Hebrew (I think I pronounced most of the words correctly); I had people take turns reading from the hagaddah (book that relates the story and guides the service); I helped explain the story to my daughters and asked them questions; I sang along to the songs in Hebrew (most of the time in tune); and I read how Moses led "our" people out of Egypt. As I read that last sentence, I thought, "Now this is a sight you don't see every day."

If people put an orange on the plate for marginalized Jews, I wonder what they would put on the plate for a non-Jew? A tomato? Yuck. A peanut butter sandwich? Too many people with

allergies. A shrimp cocktail? Not kosher. How about a kiwi? It's not offensive, it's kosher, and it's delicious.

Fortunately, before I lost my place, my brain snapped into focus just as pharaoh changed his mind about letting his slaves go. I adeptly stepped back into the hagaddah and got the ancient Hebrews across the Red Sea to safety. Moses' sister Miriam shook her timbral, and we all burst into song. I had done it. I had led the seder, soup to nuts. It was a meaningful service celebrating freedom. We all enjoyed the story, the food, and the company of family and friends.

Later that evening, I dropped Esther off at her apartment. As I started the drive back to our interfaith house, I began thinking about the evening's event. Driving alone always gives me time to think. No need for the radio--I kept singing Dayenu at the top of my lungs. I wondered how strange our seder would have seemed in the eyes of the Jewish community. I even felt a little sheepish about taking the lead in one of their greatest holidays. Then I remembered that the intermarriage rate among Jews is nearly 50 percent. I realized that there had probably been many scenes like ours around the country. I'm not sure of the significance of this. But I do think that anything that helps make Judaism a positive experience for two young Jewish girls can't be all that bad--even if it is a Protestant dad who's trying his best.

This year, our family will be back in Boston for Passover. My father-in-law, uncle Sid, or cousin Ken will probably run the seders. Now that I've directed one of my own, I'll feel more involved than ever. Of course, this year my role will not be as prominent, but that's okay. It's their home, and they do a better job. I just wonder if they'll let me sneak a kiwi onto the plate.



Jim Keen is a freelance writer based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He is intermarried and has two daughters. His book, *Inside Intermarriage*, was published by the URJ Press.



Discussion Guide

Discussion Questions for *Five Interfaith Passover Readings You Can Add to Your Haggadah*

1. What do you think of mentioning intermarriage at the seder? Are you comfortable or uncomfortable with it?
2. Do you think the artichoke is a good symbol of the modern Jewish community? Why or why not?
3. Which of these rituals would you incorporate into your seder?
4. Does your family have any non-traditional or unique rituals during the seder? What is the origin and meaning of this ritual or rituals?

Discussion Questions for *From Easter Eggs to Afikomen, Hunting for a Deeper Meaning*

1. Brianne Kuger Nadeau celebrated Easter, but now has a strong Jewish identity. What impact, if any, do you think celebrating Easter will have on your children's/grandchildren's Jewish identity?
2. Nadeau talks about the contrast between the fun of Easter and the seriousness of Passover. Do you agree with this dichotomy?
3. Nadeau held a Passover seder for her non-Jewish friends. What is your experience with having non-Jews at your Passover seder?
4. Nadeau fondly recalls her Easter and Passover experiences as a child. What impact does your own childhood experience of Passover (or Easter) have on the way you celebrate the holidays now?
5. Why do you think Nadeau had a "thirst to further [her] Jewish education and to strengthen [her] connections to her faith?"

Discussion Questions for *A Kiwi on the Seder Plate*

1. Jim Keen, a non-Jew, led his family's Passover seder. If you are not Jewish, how would you feel about leading the seder? If you are Jewish, how do you feel about a non-Jew leading the seder?
2. How do you think Jim Keen feels about raising his children Jewish after leading the seder?
3. How important is it who leads the seder? Has having different people lead the seder significantly changed your experience of Passover?
4. What do you think is so appealing to Jim Keen about Passover, as a Protestant?

Tips for Interfaith Families: How to Make a Seder Inclusive

By InterfaithFamily.com

Unlike most Jewish holidays, Passover is observed primarily in the home. The following tips are designed to make non-Jews feel more comfortable with the holiday, rituals and traditions.

1. Prepare your partner, children, and non-Jewish guests. As more and more non-Jewish partners and non-Jewish stepchildren attend seders, letting them know what to expect will be helpful. Whether you are hosting or attending a seder, explain what will happen, who will be there, what will be eaten and when, and what they will be asked to do during the meal. Tell everyone that welcoming non-Jews to the seder makes it a special and more valuable occasion and that the purpose of the seder is not to proselytize anyone, but to celebrate freedom.

2. Select the right hagaddah, the book that contains the order, blessings, narrative and songs for the seder. There are hagaddahs to reflect different approaches and needs, from traditional to liberal, from recovering alcoholics to feminists to vegetarians and more. Consider selecting a hagaddah that:

- Uses Hebrew with aligned translation and transliteration, so that people unfamiliar with Hebrew are better able to follow along.
- Is inclusive and reflects gender equality.
- Provides background and explanations for the rituals.

3. In advance of the seder, rephrase parts of it to be more welcoming to the people who will be coming to it. Doing this with your partner's and/or children's help, might enable them to feel more a part of things and can unite the family.

4. Add your own readings. Check out the article *Five Interfaith Passover Readings You Can Add to Your Haggadah* by Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael. You can include some or all of these in your own seder, or write your own blessings with your family.

5. Assign everyone passages from the hagaddah to read aloud during the seder. Participating in this way can give your partner, children and friends a better opportunity to experience the seder. Review the hagaddah before the seder to identify appropriate sections for them.

6. Connect the story of the Passover liberation story to other freedom stories, past or present, political and/or psychological (such as freedom from negative patterns). If there are particular struggles that people attending your seder would relate to (such as the struggle for independence in India if an Indian woman will attend), be sure to mention them. Or discuss ten "plagues" that we face today. This discussion may engage your partner, children and friends.

7. Have fun. Seders can be relaxed and informal. According to Ron Wolfson, a leading Jewish educator and the author of *Passover: The Family Guide to Spiritual Celebration*, some families add favorite songs that children learn in religious school, such as "Go Down, Moses," "One Day When Pharaoh Awoke in His Bed," and others. A favorite parody is *Only Nine Chairs* by Deborah Uchill Miller, a hilarious account of a family seder. For more tips on having fun at your seder,

read Ron Wolfson's *Ten Tips to Enliven the Seder: Ways to Delay That Fifth Question* on InterfaithFamily.com.

8. Don't forget the children. Traditional seders may have only three highlights for children: the Four Questions, the Ten Plagues, and the search for the afikomen. Non-Jewish children attending seders may only pay attention to the last two. Some families have created a "Pat the Bunny"-type hagaddah for young children, using coloring sheets and cotton balls on pictures of sheep, sandpaper on pictures of bricks of the pyramids, grape scratch-and-sniff stickers on pictures of the kiddush cups. Some even give children "goody bags" filled with Passover symbols, frog stickers, even moist towelettes for the inevitable spills of wine.

9. After the seder, talk with your family about the ways in which they felt comfortable and uncomfortable. Find ways to diminish any discomfort for the coming year's seder.

InterfaithFamily.com empowers interfaith families to make Jewish choices for themselves and their children, and encourages the Jewish community to welcome interfaith families. Through our website, our advocacy membership association the InterfaithFamily.com Network, and other programs, we provide useful educational information, connect interfaith families to local Jewish communities, build community, and advocate for inclusive attitudes, policies and practices.

Recommended Resources

Books

- Arnow, David. *Creating Lively Passover Seders: An Interactive Sourcebook of Tales, Texts & Activities*. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004. A terrific resource with tons of ideas for new rituals, readings, songs and activities.
- Cox, Harvey. *Common Prayers: Faith, Family, and a Christian's Journey Through the Jewish Year*. Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
- Friedland, Ronnie and Case, Edmund, ed. *The Guide to Jewish Interfaith Family Life: An InterfaithFamily.com Handbook*. Jewish Lights, 2001. Personal essays and advice for people in interfaith families.
- Kay, Rabbi Alan and Jo Kay. *Make Your Own Passover Seder: A New Approach to Creating a Personal Family Celebration*. Jossey-Bass, 2004. A fine resource, similar to Arnow's, although not quite as comprehensive.
- Kimmel, Eric A. *A Passover Companion: Wonders and Miracles*. Scholastic Press, 2004. This illustrated guide to the holiday is a great resource for children.
- Strassfeld, Michael. *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary*. HarperCollins, 1985. In addition to in-depth discussion of each holiday, this book includes commentaries, ideas for family holiday involvement, and suggestions for new traditions.
- Wolfson, Dr. Ron. *Passover, Second Edition: The Family Guide to Spiritual Celebrations*. Jewish Lights, 2003. Written by a well-known family educator, this book includes recipes, crafts and family activities to enhance observance.

Websites

- <http://www.interfaithfamily.com/passovereaster>. InterfaithFamily.com's Passover and Easter Resource Page, with links to resources and more than 60 articles.
- <http://livelyseders.com>. Companion site to David Arnow's book *Creating Lively Passover Seders*, with tools and ideas for creating your own personalized seder.
- <http://www.jewfaq.org/holidaya.htm>. Basic information on all aspects of Passover.



Ideas for Children

Activities

- Use Beanie Babies or small plastic toys to represent each of the foods and the plagues. At the end of the seder, you can let each child present keep one toy.
- Ask everyone to name a modern day Moses and why that person is like Moses. Modern examples could include Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Joshua Heschel and Gandhi.
- The Passover Box of Questions by Alef Judaica (available at www.alefjudaica.com) is a great tool to get people at the seder interacting with each other.
- If you have a collection of Haggadot, don't be shy--share them with your guests. If you are a guest, bring your own Haggadot. Children particularly like Haggadot with colorful illustrations.
- If you're feeling ambitious, prior to the seder, make puppets that represent the major characters in the Passover story. You and your family can then act out the story.

Books

- Dishon, David and Norman Zion. *A Different Night, The Family Participation Haggadah*. Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997.
- Musleah, Rahel. *Why On This Night? A Passover Haggadah for Family Celebration*. Simon Pulse, 2000. With brightly colored illustrations, stories and music. Especially good for younger children.
- Polacco, Patricia. *Mrs. Katz and Tush*. Dragonfly Books, 1994. A story about the friendship between an elderly Jewish widow and her young African-American neighbor, including his attendance at her Passover seder.
- Roekard, Karen and Nina Paley, eds. *The Santa Cruz Haggadah: A Passover Haggadah, Coloring Book and Journal for the Evolving Consciousness*. Hineni Consciousness Press, 1992. Full of games and puzzles for both adults and children to work on together.
- Wark, Mary Ann. *We Tell It to Our Children: The Story of Passover : A Haggadah for Seders*. Mensch Makers Press, 1988. Includes stick puppets you can prepare prior to the seder.
- Zalben, Jane Breskin. *Pearl's Passover: A Family Celebration through Stories, Recipes, Crafts, and Songs*. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2002. A large family, portrayed as sheep, celebrates Passover.

Ideas for Children submitted by Cathy Taylor, director of the Palo Alto School for Jewish Education.