

# *Ten Pesach Ideas*

*to Spark Meaningful  
Conversations*

***Rabbi Philip  
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# Top Ten Pesach Ideas to Spark Meaningful Conversations

With Rabbi Philip Moskowitz

1. Why is the Korban Pesach so central?
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - How do you balance individuality with a responsibility to the community?
2. Kiddush vs. Kadeish -
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - In what ways do we create sanctity? How do we sanctify our time? Does time control us or do we control our time?
3. Leaning as a form of disobedience
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - Why is disobedience sometimes important? What happens to societies that are always submissive?
4. Eating and our relationship with food
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - In what ways does food control us? How does Judaism seek to channel our animalistic instincts towards holiness?
5. Karpas -
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - What are you appreciative for? Do you express it enough?
6. Why did we need to leave Egypt with wealth?
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - Freedom means responsibility. What is our relationship with wealth? Do we use it to build an egel or a mishkan?
7. How can Hashem know what will happen?
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - Why is free will so central to Judaism? How do you relate to free will?
8. If we spend the night decrying slavery, how could we have tolerated slavery in America's early years?
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - How can we help improve the world? What needs fixing?
9. Separation and Inclusiveness
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - How do you balance the obligation to be distinct with the obligation to be a part of the world around us?
10. Making the seder relevant
  - TRIGGER QUESTION - Do we appreciate the times that we live in?

FESTIVAL OF FREEDOM

The ceremonial of the Passover meal, centered around the paschal lamb, aims at the emergence of the new *hesed* community, for *hesed* is the characteristic mark of the free man. The bondsman is not spiritually capable of joining the *hesed* community, because he is too much concerned with himself, too insecure, too fearful as regards the morrow, too humiliated to think of someone else, too frightened and too meek.

People who spent time in the concentration camps during the Holocaust tell me that something similar, something dehumanizing, happened to most of them. All emotions were extinguished, no compassion, no sympathy, no *hesed*, no concern for the “thou” stirred in their bosom. Every human instinct, every noble emotion was nipped in the bud by grisly fear and horror. When they came back to the gates of the camp after twelve or fifteen hours of work, the Nazi doctor used to look at them and classify them as right or left; right meant back into the cold barracks on an empty stomach, and left meant straight to the crematorium. There was no time to practice *hesed*; there was no time to experience the need for *hesed*; there was no time to be concerned about anyone else. There was only one fright, one horror, one fear: perhaps the doctor will send me to the left. And once the doctor said “Right,” the prisoner did not care about anyone else. This is exactly what happens to a slave. Only free and proud people think of others and share with others.

The birth of the *hesed* community—of a nation within which people unite, give things away, care for each other, share what they possess—is symbolized by the paschal sacrifice. God did not need the paschal lamb; He had no interest in the sacrifice. He simply wanted the people—slaves who had just come out of the house of bondage—to emerge from their isolation and insane self-centeredness into the *hesed* community, where the little that man has is too much for himself, where whatever he possesses transcends his ability to enjoy. Let us read a few verses in the Book of Exodus dealing with this ceremonial:

AN EXALTED EVENING: THE SEDER NIGHT

Speak unto all the congregation of Israel, saying: On the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for the house (12:3).

The Lord said unto Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance of the paschal sacrifice; no stranger shall eat thereof. . . . In one house shall it be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside, out of the house. . . (12:43, 45).

If the household is too little for a lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the souls. . . (12:4).

A new fellowship was formed around the paschal lamb; a new community sprang into existence. Being together, living with each other, sharing something many possess in common was made possible by the ceremonial of the paschal lamb. The Halakhah coined the term *havurah* with reference to the group gathering together for this ceremonial (e.g., Mishnah *Pesahim* 8:7). Eating together is a great medium of communication between individuals. Therefore, everything is shared.

The slave suddenly realizes that the little he has saved up for himself, a single lamb, is too much for him. The slave spontaneously does something he would never have believed he was capable of doing, namely, he knocks on the door of his neighbor, whom he had never noticed, inviting him to share the lamb with him and to eat together. No wonder our Seder commences with the declaration, “*Ha lahma anya*, This is the bread of poverty.” Whatever we possess, even if it is just the bread of the poor, or poor bread, is too much for us, and we invite all to come and share with us: “Let all who are hungry come and eat.”

What unites people partaking together of a common meal? Not the physical act of eating, but a sense of solidarity and sympathy. People who happen to meet in a dining car or in a restau-

*#2 Rabbi Alex Israel*

Kadesh *שקדש*: Why is this Kiddush different?

The Seder opens with Kiddush. This is certainly unremarkable; after all, Kiddush is the opening act of every Shabbat and Holiday meal. But Kiddush – the ritual sanctification of time – has an intimate and unique connection to Pesach’s central theme – freedom. How so?

As Israel was about to be released from slavery, God instituted a new calendar: “This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; the first of the months of the year for you.” (Ex. 12:2) Why is this the first mitzvah [command] communicated to a free nation?

A slave’s time is not his own. He is at the beck and call of his master. Even when the slave has a pressing personal engagement, his taskmaster’s needs will take priority. In contrast, freedom is the control of our time. We determine what we do when we wake up in the morning; we prioritize our day. This is true for an individual, but also for a nation. God’s commands Israel to create a Jewish calendar because as an independent nation, Israel should not to march anymore to an Egyptian rhythm, celebrating Egyptian months and holidays. Instead Israel must forge a Jewish calendar, with unique days of rest, celebration and memory. Controlling and crafting our time is the critical first act of freedom.

Kiddush says this out loud. We sanctify the day and define its meaning! We proclaim this day as significant, holy and meaningful. We fashion time, claim ownership of it, and fashion it as a potent contact point with God, Peoplehood and tradition. This is a quintessential act of Jewish freedom.

Today, we often feel short of time; that time controls us. “Kadesh” reminds us that true freedom and self-respect is to master and control time for ourselves, to shape our life in accordance with our values.

#1 Rabbi Soloveitchik  
Exalted Evening

בְּהִסְיָבָה The slave lives in fear. He is afraid not only of those who are stronger than he or of those who have jurisdiction over him; the slave is afraid of contradicting anyone, of antagonizing even a stranger. The fear might be unjustified, but this fear is the motivating force in his life. This is the reason, in my opinion, why the Sages introduced *haseivah*, leaning on one's left side, as the symbol of *herut*, freedom. *Haseivah* symbolizes, first, complete relaxation, which in turn manifests relief from or abatement of tension and anxiety. Second, *haseivah* symbolizes the throwing-off of the mental shackles depriving man of freedom of movement. *Haseivah* is the reverse of erect posture, which demonstrates obedience and submissiveness. Soldiers standing erect symbolize the readiness to obey. *Haseivah* is indicative of disobedience, of a courageous stand, of refusing to take orders, of rejecting the authority of man. *Haseivah* means defiance. That is why *Hazal* said that if one's teacher is present, the student is relieved – indeed, enjoined – from *haseivah* (*Pesahim* 108a).

(*Festival of Freedom*)

#4 *The Night That Unites Passover  
Haggadah: Teachings, Stories, and  
Questions from Rabbi Kook, Rabbi  
Soloveitchik, and Rabbi Carlebach*

## II. BREAKING THE MATZAH: BODY AND SOUL

Rav Kook taught that when we break the matzah into two, these two parts symbolize two ways of “Jewish eating,” both of which are illustrated during the Seder. One reason we eat is to simply satisfy our hunger – our innate, biological need for food. However, as Jews, we have another need that is also associated with food. We partake of food not only out of necessity but as a means of uplifting our spirits and becoming more attuned to our higher, nobler selves. We refine our souls through the experience of engaging in a meal.

At the Seder, the first time we eat matzah reflects our need for its sustenance; and Jewish law says that we must eat the matzah with an appetite. However, the second time we eat matzah, when we eat the *afikomen*, which is the last taste of the matzah at the end of the meal, it symbolizes our “spiritual sustenance.”

Judaism views eating as an act that carries the potential to be a deeply spiritual experience for human beings. A good example of this is how the centerpiece of Shabbat and the festivals are the mandatory meals that not only serve our physical needs and cause us pleasure, but are also a source of spiritual delight. In this way, breaking the matzah into two halves at the beginning of the Seder is a declaration that both aspects are in balance, and in fact, that both have equal validity. We appreciate the physical need for sustenance, particularly so that we will never forget those who do not have sufficient food. We must make sure, through *tzedakah*, to provide for their needs. We also value a higher form of “eating.” Namely, the aspiration to eat *l'shem Shamayim*, “for the sake of Heaven” – taking in our food as a means of being able to serve God and in this way ennobling the experiences of our lives.

Rabbi Soloveitchik once commented in a similar vein: “The world has learned how to take the animalistic act of eating and make it into an aesthetic act. However, we Jews have learned how to take an aesthetic act and raise it to an act of holiness.”

#5 *Appreciating the Small Things*  
Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

לחשוב מחשבות

של העולם, ועל כן חלים הנסים רק על דברים שכבר קיימים בעולם. באופן נוסף ניתן להסביר, כי הקב"ה דורש מהאדם להתאמץ מעט בעצמו, ורק אחר כך הוא מוכן להוסיף עוד ברכה.

אולם, ייתכן להסביר באופן נוסף. כדי שהקב"ה ישרה ברכה במעשה ידיו, חייב האדם להכיר **בדברים הטובים שיש לו**. האדם חייב שיהיה לו אסוך שמן. קטן ככל שיהיה, שהוא יודע להכיר עליו תודה. אם האדם איננו מצליח לראות את הטוב הקיים בו, אי אפשר לתת לו טוב נוסף, כיוון שהוא לא ידע להעריך גם אותו.

אנו חיים בעולם של עושר ושפע רב, ב"ה. לעתים, גם אוכל מכובד וראוי לא תמיד מספק אותנו. ליל הסדר הוא לילה של חינוך. רצונך להיות בן חורין? דע, ששום דבר לא מגיע לך. אתה צריך לעמול על הכול, לא לקבל מתנות חנם, וממילא להעריך כל דבר שאתה מקבל! מי שלא יודע להעריך ולהכיר תודה על דברים קטנים, איננו זכאי לקבל שום דבר, ובוודאי לא דברים גדולים. אדם כזה לא ידע באמת להעריך ולהכיר תודה גם על הדברים הגדולים.

הסדר נפתח באכילת הכרפס - חתיכת ירק פשוטה. לפי הנהוג כיום, מדובר בחתיכה שאף קטנה מכזית. אולם, לאחר יום שלם של אכילה פחותה והכנות מרובות - גם חתיכה כזו היא בעלת משמעות. נלמד להעריך גם כרפס, גם דבר מזערי וקטן. שום דבר שאנו מקבלים בעולם איננו מובן מאליו - על הכול אנחנו צריכים להכיר תודה!

להעריך גם דברים קטנים!

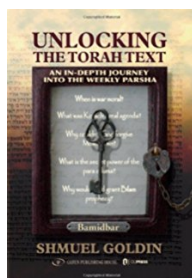
אכילת הכרפס הינה אכילה מועטת מאוד. אולם, לאחר יום שלא מרבים לאכול בו - גם אכילה כזו מקבלת משמעות, וגם אכילה כזו יודעים להעריך! הנביא אלישע (מלכים ב' ד') מתבקש לסייע לאשת אחד מבני הנביאים (שחז"ל אומרים שהיתה אשת עובדיהו) שבעלה מת, והיא לא מצליחה לשלם את חובותיה לנושה (שלפי חז"ל היה יהורם בן אחאב), וכעת הוא רוצה לקחת את שני ילדיה לעבדים:

(א) וְאִשָּׁה אַחַת מִנְּשֵׁי בְנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים  
צָעָקָה אֶל אֱלִישָׁע לֵאמֹר עֲבָדָה  
אִישִׁי מֵת וְאַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ כִּי עֲבָדָה הָיָה  
יָרָא אֶת ה' וְהַנְּשָׂה בָּא לְקַחַת אֶת  
שְׁנֵי יְלָדָיו לֹו לְעֲבָדִים:  
(ב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ אֱלִישָׁע מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה  
לָךְ הַגִּידִי לִי מָה יֵשׁ לָךְ בְּבֵית  
וַתֹּאמֶר אֵין לְשִׁפְחָתְךָ כָּל בְּבֵית כִּי  
אִם אָסוּדָה שְׁמֹן:

אלישע שואל את האישה מה יש לה בבית. מדוע הדבר חשוב? מדוע אין הוא עוזר לה מיד? יתרה מזו, **בוזהר הקדוש** כתוב שאם האישה היתה אומרת שאין לה שום דבר בבית, לא היה מתרחש הנס. מדוע?

הזוהר מסביר שהנביא היה חייב מעט שמן. כיוון שנס לא יכול לחול על ריק, ללא דבר מה לחול עליו. מה משמעות הדבר? באופן פשוט נאמר כי הקב"ה לא רוצה לחולל נסים יש מאין, וישנה עדיפות לשמור עד כמה שניתן על מנהגו וטבעו

#6 *Leaving Egypt with Wealth -  
Rabbi Shmuel Goldin*



A final, additional dimension to the episode before us can be discerned if we consider the eventual use to which the wealth received from the Egyptians is put. The gold and silver of Egypt is ultimately applied by the Israelites to two projects that could not be more vastly different: the construction of the golden calf and the creation of the Mishkan (the portable sanctuary that traveled with the Israelites through the desert). The acquired riches thus become the medium through which the Israelites actualize their choices for good and for bad. Freedom is only meaningful if you have something to lose. If the Israelites had left Egypt with nothing precious, nothing that they truly saw as their own, their liberation would have been incomplete. They would have had no way to actualize their responsibilities, to concretize their independent decisions. God, therefore, directs the departing slaves to acquire wealth. He does not grant these riches as a gift. The Israelites must see them as earned. The true challenge of an independent nation then faces the erstwhile slaves: how will they use their own prosperity, which they have earned through the sweat of their brow? The choices they make determine the very quality of their freedom.

#7 *Free Will*

בְּרוּךְ שׁוֹמֵר הַבְּטָחָתוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּרוּךְ הוּא. שֶׁהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא  
חָשַׁב אֶת־הַקֶּץ, לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ בְּבְרִית בֵּין  
הַבְּתָרִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם, יָדַע תְּדַע כִּי־גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ  
בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא־לָהֶם, וְעַבְדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה. וְגַם  
אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּן זֶן אֲנֹכִי וְאַחֲרָיִכֶן יֵצְאוּ בְּרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל.

Blessed is the One who keeps his promise to Israel, blessed be He; since the Holy One, blessed be He, calculated the end [of the exile,] to do as He said to Avraham, our father, in the Covenant between the Pieces, as it is stated (**Genesis 15:13-14**), "And He said to Avram, 'you should surely know that your seed will be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. And also that nation for which they shall toil will I judge, and afterwards they will will go out with much property.'"



## #8 Slavery

Rabbi Dr. MJ Raphall, January 4, 1861

I arrive at the conclusion, that next to the domestic relations of husband and wife, parents and children, the oldest relation of society with which we are acquainted is that of master and slave.

when I consider all this, I think you and I had rather continue to take our "requirements for moral instruction" from Moses and the Prophets than from the eloquent preacher of Brooklyn [Henry Ward Beecher].

I would therefore ask the reverend gentleman of Brooklyn and his compeers—How dare you, in the face of the sanction and protection afforded to slave property in the Ten Commandments—how dare you denounce slaveholding as a sin?

When you remember that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job—the men with whom the Almighty conversed, with whose names he emphatically connects his own most holy name, and to whom He vouchsafed to give the character of "perfect, upright, fearing G-d and eschewing evil" (Job i. 8)—that all these men were slaveholders, does it not strike you that you are guilty of something very little short of blasphemy?

It remains for me now to examine what was the condition of the slave in Biblical times and among the Hebrews. And here at once we must distinguish between the Hebrew bondman and the heathen slave....As his privilege of Hebrew citizen was thus only suspended, and the law, in permitting him to be sold, contemplated his restoration to his full rights...In fact, between the Hebrew bondman and the Southern slave there is no point of resemblance.

This, indeed, is the great distinction which the Bible view of slavery derives from its divine source. The slave is a *person* in whom the dignity of human nature is to be respected; *he has rights*. Whereas, the heathen view of slavery which prevailed at Rome, and which, I am sorry to say, is adopted in the South, reduces the slave to a *thing*, and a thing can have no rights.

The result to which the Bible view of slavery leads us, is—1st. That slavery has existed since the earliest time; 2d. That slaveholding is no sin, and that slave property is expressly placed under the protection of the Ten Commandments; 3d. That the slave is a person, and has rights not conflicting with the lawful exercise of the rights of his owner. If our Northern fellow-citizens, content with following the word of G-d, would not insist on being "righteous overmuch," or denouncing "sin" which the Bible knows not, but which is plainly taught by the precepts of men—they would entertain more equity and less ill feeling towards their Southern brethren. And if our Southern fellow-

citizens would adopt the Bible view of slavery, and discard the heathen slave code, which permits a few bad men to indulge in an abuse of power that throws a stigma and disgrace on the whole body of slaveholders—if both North and South would do what is right, then "G-d would see their works and that they turned from the evil of their ways;

## Rabbi Sacks

In miracles, God changes nature but never human nature. Were He to do so, the entire project of the Torah—the free worship of free human beings—would have been rendered null and void... God wanted mankind to abolish slavery but by their own choice, and that takes time. Ancient economies were dependent on slavery... Slavery as such was not abolished in Britain and America until the nineteenth century, and in America not without a civil war.

## Benjamin Blech:

“God waited for Lincoln to free the slaves”

*#9 Separation and Inclusiveness -  
The Night That Unites Passover Haggadah:  
Teachings, Stories, and Questions from Rabbi  
Kook, Rabbi Soloveitchik, and Rabbi Carlebach*

## SEPARATION AND INCLUSIVENESS



*“The soul of every living being shall bless Your name”*



Rabbi Soloveitchik teaches a remarkable insight regarding the way we conclude the Seder on Passover night. He questions whether any other holiday symbolizes more powerfully the theme of separation between Jews and the other nations of

the world? It is on Seder night we celebrate the end of our oppression and slavery at the hands of the Egyptians. Throughout the Haggadah our unique relationship with God is emphasized. We recite the blessing, "Blessed art Thou . . . Who has redeemed Israel." We lift the cup and say, *V'hi she'amda*, a passage suggesting total separation from the nations. Throughout the initial parts of the Seder, we have expanded upon the theme of our separateness and uniqueness.

And yet just before we conclude the Seder and are ready to drink the final cup of wine we say, "The soul of *every living being* shall bless Your name, Oh Lord our God, may the spirit of *all flesh* always glorify and exalt Your remembrance."

With these words we envision all the countries of the world joining in a grand symphony of homage to God. We move from Jewish redemption to the ultimate Redemption of mankind.

As we reach this crescendo, we remind ourselves that the whole world is sorely in need of redemption. We pray not only for *our* redemption but for the Redemption of *all mankind*.

Rabbi Soloveitchik also taught that the day of Yom Kippur follows a similar pattern. As the solemn day draws to a close, the reading chosen from the Prophets is from the Book of Jonah, describing the plight of a gentile city which repented and returned to God. In a unique teaching, the Rav draws our attention to the fact this is a tale of repentance, not about Jews, but about the city of Nineveh that actually harbored hatred for Jews. Why did our Sages choose this story for us to read as the holiest day of Yom Kippur begins to draw to a close? It comes to reassure us that the Gates of Repentance are open to all people. We pray that all people will repent and come close to God.

As we continue through the Haggadah and reach the prayer of *Nishmat Kol Chai*, the Seder night soars to ever greater spiritual heights as we pray for the day when, "every mouth shall give thanks and every tongue shall swear allegiance unto You . . . every knee shall bow to you." Suddenly our Jewish horizon is broadened, and we see ourselves concerned not only with the Jewish people but with the welfare of people everywhere.

Rav Kook also spoke about a Jew's responsibility to the world. He explains an interesting law regarding prayer which echoes this same idea: Jewish law requires a synagogue to have windows (Rambam, *Laws of Prayer*, Chapter 5). The source for this law is found in the Talmud: Rav Hiya said in the name of Rav Yohanan, "A man should only pray in a room which has windows, since it is said (Daniel 6:11): 'Now his windows were open in his upper chamber towards Jerusalem'" (Talmud, *Berachot* 34b).

Rav Kook's explanation of this passage is profound. The following are his words:

Prayer is indeed a service, personal and individual to the worshipper. Yet a precondition to its completeness is that person's recognition of the world around him. Anyone whose individualized worship of the heart leads him to withdraw from any connection with the outside world, *will not* attain perfection in prayer . . . Hence a man should not pray in a house where there are no windows. The ability to look outside will arouse him to an awareness of his duty and his relationship to the totality of the world in which he lives.

#10 Letters to Talia

*Dear Talia,*

I haven't yet received a letter from you, but I'm writing you again anyway. I want to share with you one of the greatest experiences of my whole life – Pesach on Mount Sinai. This was the most exciting Pesach of my life.

Talia, you can well imagine that celebrating the Pesach Seder at a spot looking out on the Red Sea and the Sinai expanses is a special experience. The whole Seder night I felt "as though I, personally, had gone forth from Egypt." In the middle of the Seder I had a brief stint of guard duty – on the horizon you could see the lights from ships on the Red Sea, and with a bit of imagination you could see "the children of Israel crossing on dry land within the sea...with the water as a wall to their right and their left."

I came back to the dining room shack and I sang the songs of the Exodus with greater joy and gratitude to God than I had ever felt in all my life. What a privilege it is to live in a generation in which the Jewish people have returned to the expanses of the Sinai and can see the divine promise fulfilled: "I will set your borders from the Sea of Reeds to the Sea of Philistia, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates" [Exodus 23:31]. I pinched myself to be sure that I wasn't dreaming, that everything was really happening, that I was celebrating the Seder night as an IDF soldier atop Mount Sinai. And indeed, it was no dream. It is no illusion. And suddenly, in mid-Seder, I began to sing the song that expressed what I felt:

It is no dream, my friend, it is no dream, my friend,  
No legend, if you will.

Because at Mount Sinai,  
Because at Mount Sinai,  
The bush is burning  
Still.

All the guys yelled at me, "Hey! Have you gone nuts? What happened to you?" but I persevered, and in the end they all joined in. At the last line, "The tale shall be told of the return of the nation / back to the Sinai Revelation," the walls of the shack were trembling. I literally had a feeling of being at the Sinai Revelation, of the Divine Presence being revealed. Could there be a greater revelation of the *Shechina* (the Divine Presence) than the return to Zion in our day, and the fulfillment of the divine promise to the Jewish people after two thousand years of exile?