4 Ways of connecting your Seder to Israel

Pesach is the time to reflect on the history of the Jewish people, our slavery, our redemption and our freedom. There has not been a time or a place for thousands of years in which Jews have been more free to express themselves and live Jewish lives than in the State of Israel today.

At the same time, Jews throughout the world for more than a generation have experienced a greater level of freedom than at any time since the destruction of the Second Temple. For these reasons, and following the success and positive feedback from our publication last Pesach, MERCAZ Olami and Masorti Olami once again bring you four interesting and relevant discussion pieces to add to your Seder that connect you with Israel and Jewish people around the world.

1 Klal Israel: Celebrating our Jewish peoplehood

At the start of וַיַּעַל, pour the first cup of wine, and ask someone to recite the following before Kiddush.

This night is not about just me and you, my Seder family, who are about to renew our connection with the story of Pesach. It is not about just Jews in our city or our country who share in the renewal of this connection. Jewish families all over the world are tonight assembled around festive tables to remember and connect with our shared history – a story of redemption and freedom from several thousand years ago.

Even though we spend much of our lives focused on those who are closest to us, both geographically and emotionally, tonight we feel a part of something bigger. Tonight we are celebrating Jewish peoplehood through our shared actions. No matter what language, location, culture or customs we follow, and regardless of the food served on our festive table, we all perform the same actions of retelling the story, drinking wine and lifting the maztah. This is a universal language of symbols and actions we use to offer our shared and collective gratitude to God for keeping the Jewish people.

We celebrate tonight Klal Yisrael, our common bonds and the joy of being part of the Jewish people.

2 Four outstanding women who have saved Israel & the Jewish people

During מֵרָאשׁ, after reading about the four sons, and before יִכְלּוּ מִרְאָשׁ תֵּורָה share the following thoughts:

Recent events show the challenges that still exist in parts of Israeli society for the equal treatment of women. Women may be forced to sit at the back of the bus, abused or assaulted as second-class citizens, and even prevented from praying at the Kotel.

The Haggadah has few, if any, references to women, however our tradition teaches us that בִּכְלַט נְעֵם צדיקות הנשים ישראלennes Through righteous women Israel was saved from Egypt.

Some modern thinkers even suggest adding 4 daughters to the Seder – Professor Rachel Elior suggests they are the silenced, forgotten, ignored and excluded.

We suggest taking a moment now and asking each participant at your Seder to think of and explain the significance of women from the following 4 categories:

• A woman from Biblical times
• A woman from Zionist or modern Israeli history
• A woman who is a religious or community leader in World Jewry
• A non-Jewish woman from the wider community who you feel influences academia, society, politics or culture
The survival of the Jewish people – telling the truth

During, after reading/singing הָרְסיָא שֵׁמֶרְדָּה keep your cup of wine raised, and ask the following questions:

In a night of so many questions, the truth needs to be told! Does the paragraph we have just read not perfectly describe Jewish history? Should we name, one at a time, all the enemies who have tried, or would like to destroy us? Should we devote the entire Seder to the fear we feel when mentioning their names? What should we tell our children when a nation makes it clear they wish to destroy us? What do we tell our children when they ask for a response to the threats from our neighbors? How do you explain that politics and global affairs are more complicated than a child might be able to understand?

This year, as we raise our glasses throughout the Seder to remember the promise God made to save us, let us remember and be aware of the enemies in our present generation and sadly acknowledge the threat they pose.

Rejoicing in Gilad’s freedom

In בּוֹרָך, Pour the third cup of wine, and read the following before starting the Birkat HaMazon

Last Seder night we raised our cups of wine at Kiddush and prayed for the safe return of Gilad Shalit. Last Seder night we knew that Gilad had been in captivity for 1,758 days. Last Seder night we knew in our hearts that our prayers may only be wishful thinking. However, miraculously, Gilad was freed during the festival of Sukkot, last October – a true gift to his family and for the entire Jewish people. Just as we offer thanks to God for the meal we have eaten, let us also thank God for returning Gilad to the Seder table of his family.

Our God and God of our ancestors, we raise our hearts to God in heaven in joy, happiness, and thanksgiving for the great kindness that You have shown Gilad the son of Aviva and Noam Shalit that You have restored him safely from his place of capture to his family, his country and his people.

May it be Your pleasure, God and God of our ancestors, that this day and in the future the redeemed prisoner may know joy in his heart, peace of mind and success in all his endeavors together with all his family and all Israel his brethren.

May this be Your pleasure and let us say Amen.

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Masorti Olami

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