Masorti Olami and MERCAZ Olami encourage you to connect your seder to recent events in Israel with thoughtful and relevant discussions which enrich the celebration of freedom. Follow this link for additional ideas from previous years from Masorti Olami and MERCAZ Olami: http://masortiolami.org/jewish-holidays-2/

חג פסח שמח!

Happy Passover!

Before dipping the Karpas in salt water and reciting the blessing “Boreh Pri Ha’adamah,” you can read this passage and discuss the importance of immersion in Jewish ritual life.

Mayim Hayim – Living Water

When we dip the Karpas in salt water, we symbolically remember the Egyptian enslavement of the Israelites. We remember the sorrow, the tears and the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt. Yet, dipping in our tradition doesn’t only symbolize grief but also paradoxically the joy of new life, the celebration of new beginnings and companionship. This is the immersion in the mikveh.

When Moses approached his wife Zippora and presented conversion to her, he went with her to the Nile River, a near-by source of water. Since then, Jews have regularly used mikvaot as part of the conversion process. For the last two thousand years, the process to become a Jew by choice, has included standing before a Beit Din - a rabbinic court, circumcision and immersing in the mikveh, which is a specially designed pool that collects rain water. Emerging from the water of the mikveh is equated with rebirth and the beginning of new life.

Today, there are more than 700 mikvaot in Israel. Among these, there are six that are designated for conversion. All mikvaot are under governmental supervision and are part of the Ministry of Religious Services’ responsibility. Currently, the Ministry of Religious Services strongly objects to the use of mikveh for non-Orthodox conversions.
In 2006, the pluralistic movements in Israel began legal action, which reached the Supreme Court, against the discrimination and the limitation of the use of public mikvaot. This ten-year battle ended in February 2016 with the ruling of the Supreme Court, which allows non-Orthodox conversion in public mikvaot. Judge Rubinstein’s main argument was that the state cannot discriminate and limit the use of public institutions, financed by public funding, only to certain populations and that religious freedom is a personal right that cannot be ignored.

This ruling is another step in the State of Israel’s recognition of the non-Orthodox movements in Israel. It strengthens the Jewish democratic identity of Israeli society and emphasizes the idea that there is more than one way to live a Jewish life.

Many knesset members, especially ultra-Orthodox resent this ruling by the Supreme Court and are trying to pass a law that will override the court’s ruling and will not allow the use of mikvaot without the Orthodox establishment’s permission. This suggested law is so problematic that the Attorney General is refusing to stand by it.

During this Seder, let us remind ourselves that religious pluralism and religious expression are basic rights for every person. We invite you to be part of the conversion process, to welcome those who wish to join us and to accompany them to the mikveh with joy and celebration.

Written by Rabbi Moriah SimonHazani