

that negatively affected their environment. As Jews, we are deeply concerned about the environment. Our tradition teaches us to respect nature, and it is filled with injunctions concerning our responsibility to preserve and protect our planet. In Leviticus 25:23, God commands us to respect the land because "... the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me." We live in a world we did not create—a world we do not own. We are the tenants of the land; God is the ultimate "Owner."

How do the first nine plagues compare to contemporary natural disasters?

Identify other instances in the Bible where God used the environment to achieve His goals.

Are we truly in control of the environment? Our neglect of the ozone layer continues to lead to serious problems. We are responsible for acid rain, the greenhouse effect & chlorofluorocarbons. At the same time, we have no control over such natural phenomena as hurricanes, earthquakes and tornadoes. How do we reconcile this?

### Avadim Hayyinu



Tell participants of current situations where people are being oppressed and explain how these are similar to what happened in the past. Does history repeat itself, or do problems appear in different guises? The structure of this reading follows a principle stated in the *Talmud*: "Begin with degrada-

tion and end with praise" (*Pesachim* 116a). Jews are constantly reminded that our ancestors were slaves in Egypt and were liberated by God. This occurs not only at the seder but when we chant the *Kiddush* on Sabbaths and Festivals, when we read the Ten Commandments, and especially, when we say our daily prayers. It helps us appreciate the importance of freedom and impresses upon us our responsibility to strive for the freedom of all humankind. We are meant to remember the pain of enslavement so that we will be sensitive to the pain of others.

The lesson of slavery could have been one of self-pity, causing us to flaunt our suffering in front of other nations; Or we could have learned that the only way to survive is to be constantly wary of others. But we know that to believe these things and to act in this fashion would mean that the Egyptians had taught us their ways. Instead, we are commanded: "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourself been strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9).

What lessons can we learn from our experience as slaves?

Is it possible to be free and yet feel like a slave? Why? How? What is the difference between spiritual freedom and physical freedom?



## Temple Beth Shalom

### Keeping the Story Alive: Questions and Reflections for the Seder Table





## Keeping the Story Alive: Questions and Reflections for the Seder Table

Every year, we gather together with our families and friends to recreate the story of the Exodus and celebrate our passage to freedom. It is no easy job keeping the *seder* experience perpetually meaningful. Indeed, without additional help, the yearly repetition of the *Haggadah* text may bring about diminishing returns—causing us to lose a valuable opportunity for learning and sharing with our loved ones.

One of the hallmarks of the *seder* is the practice of asking and answering questions—a process which educates participants and helps to keep them alert! Here are some questions to use at your *seder* table this year.



### Kiddush

Explain to participants that while the *Kiddush* we say over the wine every *Shabbat* or on holidays serves simply to sanctify the day, the *Kiddush* we recite at the *seder* over the four cups of wine serves an additional purpose. At the *seder*, we not only sanctify the holiday but also remember four deliberate acts of God: “I will **bring you out** from under the burdens of the Egyptians and I will **deliver you** out of their service, and I will **redeem you** with a stretched out arm and with great judgements; and I will **take you** to Me for a people...” (Exodus 6:7). Point out that no one act, alone, fulfilled God’s mission. It was, instead, the series of actions that made the exodus from Egypt such a significant event in the history of our people. As we recite the *Kiddush*, we reflect on the fact that these four actions were behaviors with a purpose—actions with intent. God redeemed us so that we would be His people and He would be our God. This is both a privilege and an obligation.

How can we fulfill our obligations to God?

The *Kiddush* prayer reflects upon the uniqueness and special nature of the Jewish people. How are we different? Why is it important that we continue to identify as Jews in today’s society, which emphasizes “equality” and “sameness?”

### Halachma Anya

We read: “Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are needy come and celebrate Passover with us.” The *Torah* makes



clear that every Jew is obligated to partake of the *Pesach* offering. The *Talmud* teaches that even the poorest person is to be provided with four cups of wine. Passover teaches that for a *seder* to be properly observed, all segments of our community must be included in our celebration. The language of the *Haggadah* is in the first person plural—WE. Our celebration is only complete when we celebrate together.

It has been suggested that participation in the *seder* is a mark of Jewish identity. Do you agree? How would you define the concept of “identity?”

We may derive from this section the teaching that we must meet the needs of all those in our community who require help—whether it be physical assistance or spiritual and emotional support. How can we show our fellow Jews that they have not been abandoned or forgotten?

### Ten Plagues

The Passover story reminds us that, ultimately, human beings do not control the environment. It was as a result of a famine that the Children of Israel went to Egypt. Egypt had food because Joseph had convinced Pharaoh to store the excess food during the years of plenty. God then punished the Egyptians for their treatment of the Children of Israel by sending plagues

