

PASSOVER SEDER 2014

The Seder is a very special occasion in most Jewish homes. I remember the Seders of my childhood, just my mother and me, following the Maxwell House Haggadah. And my saying the Fir Kashes in Yiddish, and reading words I didn't really understand, not making much sense about the four children, or the Rabbis talking through the night. I liked reciting the ten plagues, and drinking the four glasses of wine and singing the songs I learned in Hebrew school. My mother made gefilte fish and chicken soup and chicken and vegetables, and one Pesach, she even made wine out of raisins. The house was clean and there was a white table cloth and the candles were lit. I had something new on, and it was "Yontevdik."

I really liked the Seders at Sylvia's parents home. They were traditional, to the extent that my mother-in-law worked for weeks preparing for it, cleaning, changing dishes (my mother did not), and cooking, and the two daughters helped before we all sat down at the Seder table, where my father-in-law, Sam Feig, was in total control. Again, we used the Maxwell House Haggadah, but there was no effort at explaining anything. Sam ran through the Hebrew, we drank the wine, said the blessings, opened the door for Elijah, dipped our fingers in the wine glass as we said the ten plagues, hid the afikomen, and ate. For me, the best part was the singing that followed the meal. Sam had a fine voice, knew the melodies, and Sylvia and her sister Hilda, sang along.

When Sylvia's parents no longer made seders, and I had taken a job at a Reform Sunday School, I picked up a simplified Haggadah which I thought was just right for my kids. Lots of English, and among the songs we sang was "Go Down Moses." More years passed, Sylvia and I divorced, and the kids spent some Seders with me, and some with Sylvia. And then the kids were spending fewer and fewer Seders with me.

Fran and I married, we had David, and when David went to a Jewish Day School, the Seder became serious business. We bought a bunch of the new Conservative movement's Haggadahs called Festival of Freedom, and as Schechter parents, and Newton Center Minyan members, we invited, and were invited, to lots of Seders.

One funny Seder story: My old friend Alex, in fact, someone with whom I went to Hebrew school, invited us to their Seder. David was about nine. Alex used a modified Haggadah and was skipping around. David was upset, left the table and went to the bathroom, and didn't come out. Realizing he was gone for quite a while, we went to get him, and tried to explain that our host has the right to lead the Seder as he wishes.

A wonderful tradition has since developed: we alternated Seders with our friends, Mike and Julie. David and their oldest daughter, Zoe, were in the same class at Schechter. It was fun having them lead one year and us the next. Michael is knowledgeable and serious. I am not as knowledgeable and introduce anecdotes and Yiddish. And my first father-in-law's melodies.

David continued to play an active role in our Seders, not only in discussing the text, but in preparing the food. He came home most Passovers from New York and Ann Arbor, and I began to feel it wasn't a complete Seder unless David was there.

For the past several years, it has become too hard for Fran to have a large crowd, and we are no longer able to reciprocate. We have been having a small Seder one night and hope to be invited for the other night. Mike and Julie usually come through, and it has been wonderful watching their children grow, and being introduced to their friends, and watching their relationships grow.

All this is prologue. What is becoming more evident is that Pesach and Seders are a lot of work. And as we get older, it is harder to do all the work that Pesach and Seders require. Fran is no longer up to it. I do not think all the work that Fran insists on doing, is necessary, so there is tension. Nevertheless, Fran is in charge. She insists on doing all the shopping, because she does not trust me to buy all that she wants. Nor does she trust me to do all the cleaning and changing that she believes is required. She may be right.

David tries to relieve Fran of much of the cooking, but Fran insists on holding on to as much as possible. And as Pesach gets closer, Fran gets more anxious. And more critical of me. The floor is not swept. The fruit is not cut properly. I made too much charoses. I did not remove all the chametz from the kitchen. I put glasses away from last year's seder in the wrong place.

The afternoon of the first seder: What is supposed to be a joyous event is turning into a tense day filled with anger and recriminations. I am sweeping, and setting the table as Fran asked. Fran is preparing food, and at his home, David is preparing food. Dishes are transported from one place to another. There will only be six, but it is as much work as if it were sixteen. In addition to us, David has invited his friend Ben and his father, and Sara, the Indian woman who is the mother of the owner of the house in which he is living.

David geared the reading of the Haggadah to accommodate our guests, and Fran made a chicken dish which she felt they would like. When we sat down, distributed the Haggadas, and began the seder, all was well. We had grape juice instead of wine, we had a limited reading of Hebrew, David drew parallels to similar observances in other cultures, both Ben and Sara had readings, we blessed the matzah, had the bitter herbs and charoses, served the meal, and everyone was overwhelmed by all the food.

Unfortunately, people had to leave before we finished, so we missed out on the singing. I cleaned up, Fran and I were exhausted, and we looked forward to Mike and Julie's seder.

The next day, Fran kept looking through the refrigerator for the left-over roasted vegetables which she planned to take to the seder. It turned out there was nowhere near enough for 14 people, so Fran started peeling and slicing and roasting anew. Something she did not expect to do. Mike wanted us there around 6 pm. We got there around 6:30 pm. In addition to the veggies, Fran brought a special Matzah cover that David had gotten, made by the Arab women of Hebron. It was big hit. And as usual, the reading of

the Haggadah led to wonderful discussions, led by Mike. David and I did the Four Questions in Yiddish, I read a Lubavitch interpretation of the four children, and Fran an explanation of the orange on the seder plate. The food was fantastic, and the singing was wonderful. It was what a seder is supposed to be.

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