

Dating the Seder Way

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(Author's note: This piece is a 2013 version of "Dating the Seder Way," which appeared in the [NY Jewish Week](#), April 22, 2005. May we all continue to make strides toward personal and relationship redemption.)

Dating the Seder Way

Why is this date different from all other dates? On a first date with someone new, that's what we're thinking. As we try to make emotional bricks without straw, a good date is the harbinger of a heartfelt hope that we will live to see relationship redemption. And just like any ritual, the courtship process has its own order.

Kadesh: You set aside a time and place to meet. The first beverage arrives; the alcohol warms you, liberating you from the oppression of routine. Both parties begin to relax.

Urchatz: Before eating a morsel, someone excuses himself (or herself) to the washroom. This provides both parties with a moment of solitude and a chance to assess the initial chemistry. If necessary ("I just got a call and something suddenly came up"), it's also an opportunity for an early (if not particularly graceful) exit.

Karpas: During hors d'oeuvres, you realize this is someone you wouldn't mind spending a few more minutes with. You're not that hungry, but you "could eat something" – some flat crackers, maybe.

Yachatz: You begin to share anecdotes about your lives. If you're lucky, this ends up a 50-50 give-and-take, and no one can discern which half of the conversation is bigger.

Magid: Now you're into the main narrative: the substance of your date. As you tell your stories, you find resonance in the experiences of someone who, moments before, was a stranger at a strange table. You have discovered which of the Four Children you are out with.

The Wise Child attentively asks, "What do you do? Do you like it? How'd you get into that?" The Wicked Child asks, "What redeeming quality is there in that kind of career?" Because he cannot see redemption in your choices, you may smack him about the teeth, for he will not be redeemed. The Simple Child asks, "Why are we here?" and you answer him simply, and perhaps a little sadly that the conversation will remain so superficial. And the fourth child, who doesn't even know enough to ask, relies completely on you to provide conversation, which you do politely before you open the door for your inevitable exit.

But tonight you're lucky: you're out with a Wise Child, whose questions inspire you and engender conversation that flows like the Nile. You bond over past professional servitude and shed the emotional shackles of relationships past. You begin to feel as if you personally experienced your partner's suffering and feel acutely grateful that you have both been redeemed. You're so absorbed in your study of each other that you barely notice when the waiter approaches and says, "Rabotai, it's time to order dinner." You drink more wine, toasting to tomorrow.

Rahtzah: This time the retreat to the washroom is more functional. In this moment alone, you wonder if your date is checking voice mail, looking for a pillar of smoke or fire to lead him away from you and toward freedom, even if it involves exile in a relationship wilderness.

Motzi Matzah: You return to the table, relieved to find that your date hasn't made a personal exodus from the restaurant and instead has taken the liberty of ordering dinner.

Maror: There is sadness in your companion's eyes. As more is revealed about past relationships, you taste

the bitterness as if the experience had been your own.

Korech: You temper the bitter tales of loves lost with layers of humor and substance that reduce the bite, you conversation retains its pungency, but as you regain a sense of stability, your eyes water less.

Shulchan Orech: Dinner is served; you point out the pesto in your date's teeth, while your companion kindly points your napkin in the direction of the tomato sauce you missed around your mouth. The wine flows like conversation, and the conversation flows like wine.

Tzafun: Dessert finds you searching for nuance and meaning in the developing relationship. If only you could find that elusive piece of unleavened feeling, you feel certain that you would win some sort of prize. Sharing the last tastes of the meal together, you smile at each other, your hunger more than sated.

Barech and Hallel: You utter silent benedictions: you are grateful for the food, the wine, the conversation and the company, and you mentally praise the person who orchestrated the setup. Neither of you needs additional intoxication, but since the bottle's almost empty, you share the last of the wine.

Nirtzah: The order of the evening has concluded much as it began, leaving you to process your thoughts about, and memories of, the preceding hours. Simultaneously relieved and regretful, you try to treasure the moment without considering its potential spiritual impact. You're aware that following the same script with the same people sometimes yields a different result – still, you wouldn't mind doing it all again.

With the evening ended, you part ways. But as you kiss the night (and maybe even your date) goodbye, you make a wish for yourself that the emotionally connected experience you had tonight will be one you will merit to repeat, if not this year in New York or Los Angeles, then maybe next year in Jerusalem.