

They spoke about the Exodus from Egypt all night...

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

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We ended our first, basic, cliff-notes version of Pesach (“Avadim hayeinu” / “We were slaves”) with an exhortation that a person is increasingly praiseworthy the more she talks about the Exodus. But what are we now supposed to talk about? We already recounted the basic facts. And why should we increasingly talk about the Exodus? We are not going to broaden our intellectual horizons or feed an additional hungry person.

An answer that the haggadah provides at this point, is to avoid these questions. Instead, it tells us an inspirational story of leading sages who spoke collegially in a circle (*hasaba*) and discussed the Exodus through the night so enthusiastically that their students had to interrupt them. The haggadah does not tell us why we should do this. It does not lecture us with lofty or deep messages. It just provides a story that shows that we can do this. Later, it similarly simply models this behavior. It jumps around conversationally between topics without ever staying too long on any one point. And that may be the ultimate answer. We can never understand the impacts of a practice until we practice it, and the most impactful speech is that which we practice as a conversation of shared observations and not as a lecture or a sermon.

Another answer that the haggadah provides is the seder itself. We discuss redemption as we eat the pesach, matza, and maror. The four sons all question and/or are taught about the seder practices. Similarly, in a different version of our story about the sages, the sages do not simply speak about the Exodus all night. Rather, “they dealt with the laws of the paschal sacrifice the whole night” (Tosefta Pesachim 10:12). In other words, the seder teaches us how to discuss redemption.

The wise son asks how these practices are meaningful of redemption as *edot* (holidays), *hukkim* (cultural and ritual practices), and *mishpatim* (societal laws), and we tell him, “hang out and we’ll talk about it.” We hang out as sages and discuss together what we have done. Perhaps we discuss the law of making sure that the poor have matza-bread and wine to celebrate. Perhaps we discuss the law of inviting the poor (the Biblical *ger*) to join in eating the meat. Perhaps we discuss the law that the rich must tone down their food and eat their quality wheat in the same way that the poor eat their rough barley, as unleavened bread. Who knows? The conversation differs from year to year. Even those comments repeated from year to year take on a different valence in each new conversation. What the haggadah and seder can tell us is that the only way to really talk about redemption is to converse together about what we actually practice.

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