

Shulhan Orekh

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

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Who can possibly imagine Pesach seder without brisket, chicken, kugel, tzimmes, matzo ball soup and a sweet fattening dessert? Well, I can (except, perhaps, for the matzo ball soup). While "when do we eat?" is probably the most often asked question at the seder, it has often struck me as strange that after eating copious amounts of matza, haroset, maror and karpas we sit down to a full meal. For many the meal is the highlight of the seder, but is this ideal?

The Rama (Rabbi Moses Isserles, 1520-1572), in Orach Chaim 476:1, says that one should not eat or drink excessively at the Pesach meal. This is so that one does not eat the afikoman in a בלא (vulgar) way. The Mishnah Berurah defines this as eating the afikoman when one has no desire at all to eat. Later, the Mishnah Berurah comments that if one is so full that he/she is nauseated by eating even if one pushes oneself to fulfill one's obligation, this is not regarded as eating. This reminds me of the statement in Pesachim 108b, where Rava says that if one drank undiluted wine (in those days water was added to wine) one has discharged one's duty of drinking wine but has not discharged one's duty of symbolizing freedom.

What these comments share is that eating and drinking to excess diminishes or even destroys the mitzva one is performing. People with addictions echo this idea when they share that it is as if the substance they are addicted to controls them. Part of being a free person is being in control of one's food and drink intake. Thus, by eating in an ordered way at the seder, Shulhan Orekh can become a moment of liberation. In fact, it is the first opportunity to show whether all the words said before have had any effect on one's psyche or if they are just words.

A few ideas on how to do this:

1. Leave out a course and instead eat some of your favorite Pesach dishes during the week. If you're having two seders, have first course and dessert at one, soup and main course at another.
2. Serve lots of fresh salad including fruit salad for dessert. Fruit and vegetables are kosher for Pesach, do not increase in price at this time of the year, and are healthy.
3. Some people have the custom of serving an expanded karpas with lots of cut up veggies and leaving the vegetables for people to crunch during the meal. This way you are not ravenous when it comes to the food and you can eat and drink responsibly. There are halakhic issues with doing this, so do learn the issue if this is not your custom.
4. Mention some of the ideas above and encourage people to eat slowly as a spiritual act. Aim to chew food a certain number of times and make sure to enjoy the experience. Or have some of the meal in silence, really savoring the flavors.
5. Most importantly – while the meal is traditionally the time to discuss who went bankrupt last year, who should win the elections, and why Aunt Sylvia refused yet again to come to seder there are better discussion items. One can share insights into the seder. It's a good time to play a game with kids and adults (When I left Egypt I took...), discuss seders past or share hopes for what the world will look like next year.

Rabbi David Levin-Kruss teaches Mishnah, Talmud, and Jewish Thought, and is a life coach for students.

