

Preparing for the Seder: Continuity with the Future

Contributed by [Religious Action Center](#)

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Continuity with the Future: Seders and Climate Change

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"In every generation one must look upon herself as if she personally came out of Egypt."

On Pesach, we are told to feel as if we personally went free from Egypt, Mitzrayim, and the rituals of the seder help us cultivate that "memory" in many ways. We eat not only the unleavened bread that the Israelites ate in their haste, but also foods symbolic of their experience: bitter herbs, salt water "tears," and charoset "mortar" paste of fruit and nuts. We tell the story of the Exodus aloud, engaging the youngest and oldest at the table. At some seders, the participants "lash" each other with scallions, reenacting slavery, and come to the table with bags packed for a journey.

Jewish tradition has developed a suite of experiential rituals for ensuring that we personally engage with the Exodus in every generation.

Our generation of Jews, free from slavery, now faces a new burden along with the entire human family. 97% of scientists have concluded that burning fossil fuels is pouring heat-trapping climate pollution into the atmosphere, causing our Earth to warm.

One reason people have been slow in responding is that we're wired to focus on more immediate threats. The human brain is "a beautifully engineered get-out-of-the-way machine ... for things out of whose way it should right now get," wrote Daniel Gilbert in a Los Angeles Times article. Gilbert continues: "Just a few million years ago, the mammalian brain learned a new trick: to predict the timing and location of dangers before they actually happened ... But this innovation is in the early stages of development ..."

Tragically, writes Gilbert, human beings "haven't quite gotten the knack of treating the future like the present it will soon become."

Perhaps the Jewish knack for connecting with the past can help us. The Haggadah insists that we experience continuity with generations that experienced the Exodus in the past. The climate crisis asks us to feel a sense of personal connection and responsibility with generations in the future.

What if we used the seder not only to feel as if we personally were present in the Exodus from Egypt, but also to experience ourselves in the world our grandchildren will live in, in the climate we are damaging now?

If, in this generation, we looked upon ourselves as sitting side-by-side with those who'll gather around our families' seder tables in two or three generations, what would we be doing about climate change now?

For more information on the environmental justice, please visit rac.org/enviro.

For all Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism resources, please visit rac.org/Passover.