

Passover Optimism

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Some of Passover's most appealing aspects are its simplest, which makes it easy for interfaith families to enjoy. On the surface, the story fits that classic "Jewish Haiku" distributed in e-mails worldwide: "They tried to kill us; we won; let's eat." Underpinning this oversimplified (though not necessarily inaccurate) version and the more traditional Passover story found in the *Haggadah* is a real sense of optimism. We can share this optimism with all our friends and family members, regardless of their faith of origin.

Passover optimism is found in the season, in the story, and in the family.

Springtime is the most optimistic time of year, especially up here in the cooler climates. The birds begin singing again, the trees and flowers bud ...the potential for rebirth is all around us. A simple message of hope and renewal is in everything we see, hear, smell, and touch during this season, so much so that these feelings may even go unmentioned! Luckily, the various elements of the Passover *seder* remind us to articulate and give thanks for this time. It's a universal message from which everyone can take strength.

In fact, universality is another great appeal of the Passover story. We were slaves but now we are free. Who can't relate to that! Hasn't everyone been held captive to his or her own inner-demons, at one point or another? These themes of freedom and renewal are not merely *simulated* through the telling of the Passover story, but are *stimulated* in our collective memories, through the rituals and symbols of the *seder*. But along with these traditions, it's also up to each one of us, to help everyone else at our *seder* table recognize and maximize this season of spiritual rebirth.

To maximize the Passover optimism, it's important to make your *seder* FUN. If you find the service tedious or the prayers incomprehensible, somebody's doing something wrong! Yes, there are bittersweet memories of our time in captivity. We dip bitter herbs in saltwater tears. We solemnly check off the plagues that smote our enemies. We even sing a little ditty about the Angel of Death, who killed the butcher, who killed the ox, who drank the water, that quenched the fire, etcetera, etcetera, *chad gadya, chad gadya*. But only through remembering the bad times can we fully appreciate the good. That's the real celebration of Passover.

As you gather for the holiday, remind yourself and your family that *these* are the good times. You're surrounded by loved ones, in the warmth of a home (rather than the formality of a synagogue), reclining in comfort and knocking back four glasses of wine per *seder*. Enjoy the spring season, use it as a sort of "spiritual spring cleaning," and help those at your table maximize the Passover optimism as well. And now... let's eat!