

What Would You Take With You?

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Source: Foundation for Family Education, Inc.

By Rabbi Goldie Milgram

After asking the four questions, in some Moroccan families, the person leading the seder leaves the room and returns with the afikomen in a napkin draped over their shoulder (Tom Sawyer fashion, for Mark Twain fans) and then recounts the story of the exodus out of Egypt. This got me to thinking, if I was told overnight that I was leaving Egypt - what would I take with me? I recalled a Holocaust survivor showing me the little stack of photos she'd sewn into the leg of her pants just before she was taken prisoner.....what would you take?

1. In advance make sure there is a large napkin at each place.
2. You could begin by teaching the Reb Nachman song: Kol ha olam kulo gesher tzar mo'od, v'ha eekar lo l'fakheyd klal. All of the world is a very narrow bridge and the main thing is not to fear at all."
3. Tell participants to "imagine you are being forced to leave your home immediately. Everything you can take with you must fit into your napkin. You can take two kinds of things with you. Material things and the qualities of yourself that be your best assets for this part of your journey. Take a few minutes in silence to decide what you will pack into your napkin, and when you are ready, sling it over your shoulder and stand in your place. We will go on a meditation walk exodus when everyone is ready and has their napkin filled.
4. When many people are standing begin the Reb Nachman song until everyone likely to rise has done so. Now begin to walk around the room (if feasible) chanting, on a nice day you can do as some eastern Jews do and walk around the outside of the house and back in.
5. Return to seats or if not walking, quiet down the chant to silence. After several minutes of silence invite people to share what they decided to take - objects and qualities.
6. Breaking into a joyful version of the Reb Nachman song work out great at this point. The Torah says that those who left Egypt were an eyrev rav, a "mixed multitude." Point out how those gathered at your table compose the "erev rav" - the mixed multitude of multi-talented people composing our community and people at this time in history. We are always leaving an Egypt in our lives; by its nature life is full of narrow places, which is the meaning of the root word which makes up the Hebrew term for Egypt. (Mitzrayim.....root is "maytzar" which means narrow place, birth canal or strait.") Because we have each other we are strengthened in our journeys through such times. This is the importance of having a minyan in our lives. To remind us that life is like a sine wave, full of ups and downs, that nothing stays the same, that we are precious beings and together we can safely remember our Egypt-times, that we can do our best to support each other when being reformatted in the wilderness and know that achieving our desired changes will ready us for entering the promised lands of our dreams. Copyright 2002 Rabbi Goldie Milgram