

Seder Night at the Improv

Some prompts for fun and thinking for Seder night

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1. “This is the Bread Of Affliction”—Wait, what bread is this?

After we read “Ha lachama anya,” that our Matza is the bread of affliction, we might remember that it’s also the bread of freedom. What is the real nature of the matza?

The Scene: A high-end bakery shop. An irate customer is trying to return his *matza* to the baker. He thought he was purchasing the bread of redemption but then discovered he received the bread of affliction. The two argue over what the *matza* really is, and if the customer has a right to return it or exchange it.

The Actors: The Baker, The Customer

The Props: a baker hat, toy matza, toy soft matza

Prompts: a) the shopkeeper tries to replace the old *matza* with a new *matza* that looks the same, but this one is “redemption”

b) End the argument by replacing the Ashkenaz matza with a Sephardic matza (soft toy)—now it’s redemption!

Redemption (for the baker)	Affliction (for the customer)
We bake it fast, to show that we’re not stuck in time, we transcend time	This is what we ate when we had no time to bake anything well
It is only flour and water, completely independent, completely free	It tastes like cardboard
G-d redeemed us so quickly, because He loves us so much, we didn’t have time to bake it, it’s a symbol of freedom	In Devarim Hashem calls it “Lechem Oni (16:2)”

2. “We would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt”—How Israeli Are You?

We read that if Hashem hadn’t taken us out of Egypt, we, our children and our children’s children would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. Which doesn’t seem that logical. And might make us wonder about how hard it is to really leave the country and the culture that we are born into.

The Scene: Somewhere in Israel, some friends/relatives meet up. Some have been in Israel for a long time. Some have been in Israel for less time. The one who's been there for the shortest begins the conversation, declaring that they are feeling very Israeli now that they're here.

The Actors: Two or more people.

The Props: Some American and Israeli swag might be fun. A pashmina is a good prop.

Prompts: something like this example, for inspiration:

Colette: (with Israeli flag, but also American): I'm so Israeli look!

Tutu: Girl, ur not even that Israeli you don't even have a *pashmina*!

Ora: Yeah you don't even eat your *shawarma* with *amba*!!

Tutu: What's *amba*?

Colette: What's *shawarma*?

Ora: a bunch of amateurs.

Mayan: Yeah when I was on base in *baflachish* they gave us a huge tub full of *amba* once.

Ora: what's *baflachish*??

Mayan: אף אחד פה לא מבין עניין (no one here understands anything)

3. "I am like a man of 70 years"—You Think You're So Smart?

These words were said by Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria, who lived in the challenging times after the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash. He was asked to assume control of the Sanhedrin when he was very young. Maybe 18. Maybe only 16. Miraculously, overnight he grew a long white beard, a sign that despite his youth, he was wise. Which might make us wonder about the wisdom of youth and the wisdom that comes from experience. Who has a better grasp of what Pesach is all about?

The Scene: No specific place. This is a loose discussion (argument?) about who is better qualified to understand what Freedom means.

The Actors: Two or more people, with an age gap between them. Best if the older one plays the part of the younger, and the younger plays the part of the older.

The Props: Different things that suggest youth and old age. Perhaps fake beards, one grey and one brown. Hats, a cane. For youth, for fun, maybe a baseball cap, flashy rapper fake jewelry and sunglasses.

Prompts:

Young People Understand Freedom Better	Older People Understand Freedom Better
Their minds are more free	Understand how to work hard for something
They are more spontaneous	Won't be captured by false things that promise freedom
Not set in their ways	Know that real freedom is within
Open to learning new things	Have actually read real books, and gotten a real education
Understand the modern world and modern technology	Values things that should be valued
More adventurous	Understand history

4. The Four Sons—5 Voices Tell A Story

We read about the four sons, in the middle of the Haggadah narrative. They describe our children, or the people around us. But they also describe parts we hold in ourselves. What would it be like to tell the story of Pesach and include all their voices in the narrative?

The Scene: A classroom, with a teacher and four students. The students are each a different type: Nerd, Rebel, Hippie and Checked Out. The teacher begins Roll Call, using their type as their name, and then can't find Clueless (the missing 5th son). He has to send one of the other students to bring him/her into class. After everyone arrives, the teacher asks the students to tell the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim. They each say one sentence of the story, going around in a circle. The goal is to get to the end of the story.

The Actors: A teacher. 5 students: Nerd, Rebel, Hippie, Checked Out and Clueless.

The Props: Whatever small things fit the type, or nothing. Maybe a pointer for the teacher. Could arrange some chairs from the table into a teacher/student pattern.

Prompts: Highlights of the story that could be covered: The slavery. The Midwives. Moshe Being Born. Moshe in the Palace. Moshe Runs Away. Burning Bush. Each of the ten plagues. Korban Pesach. Leaving Egypt with no time to bake Matza. Being chased by Egyptians. Splitting of the Sea.

5. "They will come out with great wealth"—Who wants to be rich?

"Please, speak into the ears of the people (Shemot 11:2)" That's how Hashem asks the Jews to ask the Egyptians for wealth before they leave. Sounds like a favor. Brachot 9b comments

that not all the Jews were happy about this request. The Midrash compares this to a jailor who tells a prisoner they will go out free tomorrow with great wealth. The prisoner replies, just let me go now, I don't care about the wealth! There is the possibility the Jews were still scared of their taskmasters. And there is also the aspect of this feeling like blood money, as if there is anything that could make up for the pain of slavery. (When Ben Gurion agreed to accept reparations from the Germans, people stoned the Knesset). This makes us wonder about the process of getting this treasure, and why it was valuable.

The Scene: Egypt. Two Jews. One does not want to go, and the other has to convince him. They go together to ask the Egyptian for wealth. The Egyptian at first denies having anything to give. In the end they get the treasure. (Could be a small treat or candy prepared ahead of time)

The Actors: Two Jews. An Egyptian

The Props: "Jewish" hats and Egyptian hat. Something for the treasure.

Prompts: The Egyptian could say he has no money. The Jew can tell him exactly where the money was hidden, since the Midrash tells us they saw everything that was hidden during the plague of darkness. Perhaps the Egyptian tries to trick them first by giving them fake treasure. In the end, he gives them everything, begging them to leave Egypt.

6. Hashem saves us from their hand!—Tefillah

This is not an improv, but it's not possible to prepare Seder this year without making space for Tefillot to pour out our hearts for our holy Soldiers and for the remaining Hostages. This Tefillah is from Rav Rimon:

מוֹדִים אֲנַחְנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ,
שְׂזָכֵינוּ לְחַיּוֹת בְּדוֹר שֶׁל גָּאֻלָּה, וְשְׂזָכֵינוּ לְרֵאוֹת בְּתִקּוּמַת מְדִינָתֵנוּ.
שְׂזָכֵינוּ לְרֵאוֹת בְּגִבּוֹרַת עַמּוּנוּ, וְשְׂזָכֵינוּ לְנִסִּים וּלְנִפְלְאוֹת כְּפִי שֶׁהִבְטַחְתָּנוּ בְּיַד עַבְדֶּיךָ הַנְּבִיאִים.
יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתַּחַזֵּק וְתִשְׁמֹר אֶת חֵילֵי צְבָא הַהִגָּנָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל.
וְאִנְשֵׁי כַחוֹת הַבִּטְחוֹן, הַעוֹמְדִים עַל מִשְׁמַר אֶרְצֵנוּ וְעַרְי אֱלֹהֵינוּ
תֵּן אֶת אוֹיְבֵינוּ הַקָּמִים עָלֵינוּ נִגְפִים לְפָנֶיךָ.
שְׁמֹר אֶת חֵילֵנוּ מִכָּל צָרָה וְצוּקָה, וּמִכָּל נֹגַע וּמַחֲלָה,
וְשַׁלַּח בְּרָכָה וְהַצְלָחָה בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ.
הִשָּׁב אֶת הַשְּׂבוּיִים וְהַחֲטוּפִים בְּרִיאִים וְשְׁלָמִים בְּרוּחַם וּבְנַפְשָׁם,
שֶׁלַּח מְהֵרָה רְפוּאָה שְׁלָמָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם לְכָל הַפְּצוּעִים,
וְנִקֵּם נִקְמַת דָּם עַבְדֶּיךָ הַשְּׁפוּרָה.
הַמִּשְׁרָךְ גָּאֻלָּתֵנוּ וּפְדוּת נַפְשֵׁנוּ,

קָשָׁם שֶׁהִצִּילָנוּ מִכָּל אֱלֹהֵי שָׂבָאוּ עָלֵינוּ לְכָלֹתָנוּ.
תֵּן עֵצָה טוֹבָה לְמִנְהִיגָנוּ, וְתַטֵּעַ אֲחִדּוּת וְאַהֲבָה בְּתוֹכָנוּ.
וְנֹאמַר: "אָמֵן".

We give thanks to You, our God and the God of our forefathers,
That we have merited to live in the generation of the redemption, that we merited to
witness the establishment of our country,
That we have merited to see the strength of our nation, that we merited to witness
miracles and wonders that were promised to us by Your servants, the prophets.
May it be Your will, Hashem, our God and the God of our forefathers, that You strengthen
and protect the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces and all the security forces, that stand
guard over our land and the cities of our God.
Give over our enemies who rise up against us to be struck down by them,
Protect our soldiers from all trouble and distress, affliction and illness, and send blessing
and success to all the work of their hands,
Return the captives and hostages healthy and whole in spirit,
Send a speedy full recovery from the Heavens to all the injured, and avenge the spilled
blood of your servants,
Continue our redemption and the redemption of our spirit,
just like you saved us from all those who came upon us to destroy us.
Give good counsel to our leaders, and plant unity and love in our midst.
And let us say, "Amen"

7. "Lavan wanted to uproot everyone"—The Worst Kind of Evil

The Haggadah here seems to consider Lavan as possibly worse than Pharaoh. Possibly because he considered our family as his own. To Lavan, we were not about to become the Jewish nation, we were just part of his tribe. Which might make us think about the different ways our nation has been, and is currently, under attack. Some want to assimilate us. Others to dehumanize us. Which is the biggest danger? The Midrash tells us that Miriam told her father she was worse than Pharaoh, when he separated from her mother, refusing to bring more children into the world during Pharaoh's decree to throw Jewish babies into the Nile.

Are we a bigger danger to ourselves than our enemies are to us?

The Scene: A debate, or an argument. Pharaoh and Lavan. They are boasting about which is the ultimate master villain. Miriam interrupts the skit.

The Actors: Pharaoh and Lavan Miriam

The Props: A Pharaoh hat and something white for Lavan, who we dub "whitey," because lavan is white. I use a guy fawkes mask I happen to have. Could be a white hat, or just a white scarf. A head scarf for Miriam, or maybe a princess crown.

Prompts: Lavan argues that assimilation is the best method for destroying the Jews. Pharoah argues that dehumanization and brute force is the best. As they are arguing, little girl Miriam could interrupt, saying she is actually the most powerful.

8. “And they became there a great nation”—Inspiration from the Past

This is not a skit. However, since the Haggadah at this point tells the story of someone telling the story of Pesach, it’s an excellent time to tell our own stories. We are planning to ask the four oldest people at the Seder to tell us a story about their childhood seder.

9. The Wild Animals – Why are we here?

The Midrash tells us that Hashem brought wild animals from all over the world to join forces for this Makkah. Were there not enough wild animals native to Africa? What might be the meaning behind this motley assortment of beasts?

The Scene: A bunch of animals from all over the world find themselves suddenly outside of Egypt. They are trying to figure out why on earth they are there, and what they’re supposed to be doing.

The Actors: A Canadian brown bear, an Indian Tiger, an African giraffe, and a British Lion

The Props: Animal masks

Prompts:

The brown bear can say “eh/aye” at the end of each sentence. The tiger can call everyone dear. The Lion is the national symbol of Britian, but there are no lions whose natural habitat is Britain, so the giraffe, who is African thinks the Lion is a poser. The Lion is of course condescending and uses the phrase “hakuna matata (no worries)” way too much.

Reasons for the Plague of Wild Animals
Egyptians made the Jews hunt and capture wild animals that they would then use for entertainment while torturing the animals and the Jews
Pharoah’s decree made Jewish women labor in the fields, in secret, like wild animals, to try to save their babies
The different parts of Egyptian society, who all hated each other, were able to unite in their hatred for the Jews.